

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-10

AID-05 EB-07 COME-00 /075 W
----- 087820

R 181025Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY DACCA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5822

INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 0878

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PBOR, BG, IN

SUBJECT: INDO-BANGLADESH MARITIME BOUNDARY: IMPASSE CONTINUES

REF: DACCA 0586

1. SUMMARY: THE FEBRUARY 7-10 MEETINGS BETWEEN BENGALEE AND INDIAN DELEGATIONS HERE IN DACCA FAILED TO MOVE THE MARITIME BOUNDARY ISSUE ANY CLOSER TO RESOLUTION. ACCORDING TO INDIAN DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSION J.N. DIXIT, THE POSITIONS ARE AS FAR APART AS EVER, AND THE INDIANS ARE DEEPLY ANNOYED. CONTRARY TO PRESS REPORTS, THE SOLE SUBJECT OF THE MEETINGS WAS THE MARITIME ISSUE. END SUMMARY.

2. DIXIT SAID THAT THE PRESENCE OF INDIAN FOREIGN SECRETARY KEWAL SINGH IN DACCA AND HIS MEETINGS WITH HIS BENGALEE COUNTERPART, FAKHRUDDIN AHMED, WERE INTENDED TO ELEVATE THE MATTER ABOVE THE LEGAL QUIBBLING WHICH AS MARKED MOST OF THE EXCHANGES TO DATE AND TO ACHIEVE POSSIBLE ACCOMODATION. THE DHC SAID THAT THE INDIANS NEVERTHE- LESS MADE A SERIOUS TACTICAL ERROR AT THE ONSET. INSTEAD OF INSISTING THAT THE DELEGATIONS PICK UP WHERE THE NEW DELHI MEETINGS LEFT OFF, THE INDIANS
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AGREED TO A BENGALEE PROPOSAL TO RECAPITULATE THE

RESPECTIVE POSITIONS. TO THE HORROR OF THE INDIANS, THE BANGALEES SET FORTH FURTHER--AND NEW--ARGUMENTATION FOR THEIR BOUNDARY CLAIMS, AND THUS, IN EFFECT, BEGAN THE NEGOTIATIONS AFRESH. IN THIS SITUATION, THE LAWYERS WERE GIVEN A NEW OPPORTUNITY, AND TWO DAYS PASSED BEFORE THE FOREIGN SECRETARIES COULD RE-ENTER THE NEGOTIATIONS.

3. DURING THE LATTER HALF OF KEWAL SINGH'S STAY IN DACCA, THE FOREIGN SECRETARIES, ACCOMPANIED BY SELECTED SPEAR BEARERS, CALLED ON SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN TO APPRISE HIM OF THE PROGRESS (OR LACK THEREOF) TO DATE. THE PRESIDENT ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE DID NOT WHOLLY GRASP ALL OF THE FINE POINTS WHICH DIVIDE INDIA AND BANGLADESH BUT STRESSED THAT HE WANTED AN EARLY RESOLUTION. THE INDIAN DELEGATION WAS HEARTENED BY THIS. DIXIT SAID THAT AS THE MEETINGS GROUND TO THEIR END, THE INDIANS PROPOSED A MARITIME BOUNDARY WHICH THEY DEEM TO BE AN EQUITABLE COMPROMISE. USING BANGLADESH BASE LINE POINT NUMBER ONE (SEE DACCA 1777 OF APRIL 22, 1974), THEY WOULD ACCEPT A LINE FALLING WESTWARD OF THE MEDIAN LINE. IF THIS WERE ACCEPTED, INDIA WOULD ABANDON ITS CLAIM TO APPROXIMATELY 1500 OF THE ROUGHLY 6000 SQUARE MILES OVER WHICH IT CONTENDS BANGLADESH WRONGLY ASSERTS JURISDICTION. DIXIT SAID THAT FOR A BRIEF MOMENT THIS PROPOSAL APPEARED TO PROVIDE A BASIS FOR ACCOMODATION. HOWEVER, IN THE END, FAKHRUDDIN AHMED SAID THAT BANGLADESH HAS NO GIVE IN ITS POSITION. THE INDIANS CONCLUDED, SAID THE DHC, HOWEVER MUCH MUJIB MAY WANT TO REMOVE AN IRRITANT IN INDO-BANGLADESH RELATIONS, HE WAS PERSUADED TO HOLD FAST WHEN REMINDED OF THE CONSEQUENCES WHICH MIGHT FLOW WERE BANGLADESH TO ABANDON ITS CLAIMS TO JURISDICTION OVER WATERS WHERE, AS THE INDIANS UNDERSTOOD, IT HAD ALREADY GRANTED CONCESSIONS FOR EXPLORATION.

4. DIXIT SAID THAT THE INDIANS WERE VERY ANNOYED, AND KEWAL SIGNH, NORMALLY A VERY RESERVED MAN, TOLD FAKHRUDDIN AHMED THAT FAILURE TO MOVE TOWARD A SOLUTION TO THIS ISSUE WOULD POSE REAL PROBLEMS FOR INDIA.
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DIXIT SAID THAT PRIME MINISTER GANDHI AND FOREIGN MINISTER CHAVAN HAD HOPED TO AVOID A SITUATION IN WHICH BANGLADESH WAS PLACED UNDER PRESSURE. HOWEVER, AGRICULTURE MINISTER JAGJIVAN RAM AND DEFENSE MINISTER SWARAN SINGH HAVE BEEN URGING A TOUGHER LINE. ACCORDING TO THE DHC, UNLESS THERE IS SOME FORWARD MOVEMENT IN THE NEXT TWO WEEKS, THE INDIANS WILL BEGIN TO APPLY A MEASURE OF DIPLOMATIC PRESSURE. INDIA MAY WELL

DECLARE THE INDO-BANGLADESH MARITIME BOUNDARY TO BE
THE MEDIAN LINE, AND USE FOR ITS BASE POINT THE LOW
TIDE ELEVATION; IT WILL SIMPLY INFORM BANGLADESH OF
ITS ACTION, IN ADDITION, HE SAID THAT CARLSBERG, THE
US FIRM GRANTED EXPLORATION RIGHTS BY INDIA IN THE
WATERS ADJACENT TO THOSE OF BANGLADESH, WILL BE TOLD
THAT IT NEED NOT HEED ANY ASSERTIONS BY BAN*

*****MAFVVZCZ

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: BOUNDARY DETERMINATION, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, BOUNDARY CLAIMS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 18 FEB 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: RowellE0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975DACCA00878
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750058-0485
From: DACCA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750236/aaaabggk.tel
Line Count: 127
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 DACCA 0586
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: RowellE0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags: ANOMALY
Review Date: 04 AUG 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <04 AUG 2003 by izenbei0>; APPROVED <21 NOV 2003 by RowellE0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: INDO-BANGLADESH MARITIME BOUNDARY: IMPASSE CONTINUES
TAGS: PFOR, PBOR, BG, IN
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006